Cher

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/31633766.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Mischa Lecter, Chiyoh (Hannibal), Vladis Grutas
Additional Tags:	Language Kink, ...sorta?, Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, Will Graham Loves Hannibal Lecter, Murder Husbands, Courting Through Murder, Dark Will Graham, Will Graham Knows, low key morticia and gomez vibes, Mischa Lecter Lives, Castle Lecter, Crime Scenes, Protective Hannibal Lecter, protective Chiyoh, Beverly Katz is the Best, Will Graham & Beverly Katz Friendship, Hanners is kinda thrown by his feelings, Dating, Food as a Metaphor for Love, Eventual First kiss, eventual smut? idk maybe
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-06-06 Updated: 2021-12-10 Words: 12,240 Chapters: 11/?

Cher

by orphan_account

Summary

For Clary_20, who requested this fic. Thanks for chatting with me!

AU where Hanners is completing his residency in Louisiana, and meets Will, who's a police officer. Mischa and Chiyoh are roommates -- Chiyoh is a military analyst, and Mischa's a college student. When Hannibal and Will meet, a new game of fishing and hunting is born.

Updates ~weekly.

Trout

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"A fish fry?" Mischa practically squealed. "It sounds charming, brolis, you ought to go -- if only for the experience."

Hannibal let out a long-suffering sigh that made Mischa giggle with its theatricality, especially since the phone only served to amplify it. "Very well, then, mieloji. I will go, but you will bear the consequences by listening to all my inevitable woes."

The huff that came through betrayed what was, unmistakably, the eye roll with which Hannibal had grown up. "Take pictures! It is your first social event during your residency, Dr. Lecter. But seriously," she admonished, sotto voce, "be... careful." *Don't get caught. Please. You're all I have.*

Though she couldn't see him, Hannibal nodded gravely. "I promise." Noting that phones calls were never completely confidential, he added, "It should be no problem. I find myself supremely repulsed by the selection of liquors here anyway. And you know I seldom keep unnecessary valuables on my person."

"Wear the custom-made Seiko watch, not the Patek Phillippe. We don't want you to get mugged." *The one with the concealed razor blade,* she neglected to add.

Hannibal nodded again. "Mischa... do not worry. Have fun with Chiyoh, and do listen to her from time to time. She is the more sensible of the two of you," he chided, to her playful chagrin. "Tell her I said hello."

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15 years ago, Castle Lecter, Aukštaitija, Lithuania

Hannibal blinked into consciousness, tentatively, noting the familiar musty scent of the underground and the sharp tang of rust. Though he could see nothing, his sense of smell alone informed him that he was in the basement of the castle. Still on home territory, then. *As if brought in by his shiver, the sweet smell of sunshine on windblown hair informed him of the other two presences in the room.*

"Mischa?" If it was not for the faint circulation of air made mellow by the very act of touching Mischa alone, Hannibal would have thought her dead.

"She is alive, I believe," another voice echoed against the stone walls. "Where are you?"

Hannibal closed his eyes, letting out a breath of relief. "I am bound to a pipe against the southern wall. You must be near the center of the eastern wall, are you not?"

"Yes," Chiyoh whispered. "We must leave. Give them a proper burial at a later point, after we have secured Mischa's safety." So this is not a nightmare. *A rancid surge of dull pain threatened to disembowel Hannibal right where he stood. Still, Chiyoh was right. Better to survive, first.*

"They were still upstairs when Mischa and I were tied here," continued Chiyoh. For a brief moment, Hannibal allowed himself to marvel at the evenness of her tone. "It will no doubt take them quite some time to finish ransacking your parents' quarters, let alone Robertus and Murasaki's. We must leave before then."

While listening to Chiyoh's report, Hannibal felt at the tape binding his hands. "Chiyoh... tell me, how are you bound?"

A nervous snort sounded in response. "Mischa and I were bound together to a pipe, like you. There is some give to the ropes around our torsos as I puffed myself out when they were restraining me. My hands are bound with tape."

Hannibal lifted his arms as high as he could, shifting a bit to ensure that his side faced the wall. Suddenly, he brought his taped wrists against his stomach as hard as he could, snapping the strips of tape upon impact. "It would seem that basic physics has allowed me to free my hands," he attempted to quip as he worked his way through the ropes still binding his midriff. His voice wavered. Never again, *he thought to himself.*

"... 'Anniba?" Mischa's own trembling voice coursed into the darkness. He made quick work of the knots confining her to the pipe, then proceeded to free Chiyoh before gathering Mischa into his arms. "I am here, brangiausia. Always." Shivering against his chest, she bit at her own fist to stifle her cries. Hannibal was surprised to see no trace of fear in her features, but felt a sudden howling cold run up his spine at the realization that she showed no fear only because she was already beyond the point of fear, in a place of deadly calm that lay in the eye of an emotional storm.

"Chiyoh," he called, handing Mischa to her. "We will perish in the cold without provisions."

She shook her head, and Hannibal clamped his hands over Mischa's ears. "We do not have time. They may be in the kitchens now, plundering the pantry. Furthermore, they bound us all together. It is likely that they did so to kill us in front of one another."

Nodding, Hannibal planted a kiss on Mischa's forehead, and gathered up the rope spooled on the ground. "If you are correct, then it is likely that they will come for us soon. I am older and can bear heavier loads, so I will carry Mischa and run north through the woods. Will you go to the gardener's lodge to fetch necessities? We will meet at the crooked tree near the side of the —"

The sound of footsteps on wet stone echoed through the basement halls. Chiyoh hastened to place Mischa in the corner of the room, signaling for her to remain silent, and met Hannibal's gaze as they poised themselves at the doorway. When the large wooden door swung open to reveal only one somewhat inebriated plunderer, Hannibal nearly sighed in relief. Beside him, Chiyoh suddenly burst into tears. "Ple- please don't hurt us," she stammered, in a tone Hannibal could scarcely believe was her own. It seemed that whatever

her plan was failed, however, when Mischa let out a whimper. Genuine panic froze her face, as she pressed her lips together, eyes widening at Hannibal.

”There is gold in the gardener’s lodge,” Hannibal practically shouted. Shakily, the ruffian turned to him, jabbing a finger into his face. “Gollldddd…”

”Yes,” Hannibal continued. “You are here alone. You will be able to take it for yourself without your companions noticing.” He herded the man back out into the hallway, away from Mischa.

Not ten steps later, a rope whirled over Hannibal’s head and around the drunk man’s neck before a storm of limbs swung and knocked him against the stone wall.

"Grutas?" Distant voices slurred.

"Take Mischa and go," Hannibal whispered urgently. "I will fetch whatever we need." As Chiyoh's footsteps, made heavier by Mischa's weight, clattered out of the basement, he turned towards Grutas's body. The sounds of the inebriated thugs seemed to amplify by the second, so he quickly bound Grutas to the nearest pipe, leaning him against the wall in a position resembling that of a man smoking a cigarette.

"Gruuut-aaaassss!" The calls continued. Hannibal ran, finally allowing his tears to join the sweat that seeped from his pores as his feet pounded furiously against the ground.

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5 years later, Neuilly-sur-Seine, Paris

The Lecter graves, decked with lilies and poppies, were polished to the point of reflecting the light of the setting sun. Hannibal and Chiyoh, each holding one of Mischa's hands, stood back to behold their work as if if they were before the doors of heaven themselves.

A fresh line of tears rolled down Mischa's soft cheek. "Mama," she croaked. Hannibal swept her into his arms, as Chiyoh's fists clenched in fury.

"Have you done it?" she finally asked.

Hannibal nodded. "Yes."

"Do not show Mischa. She is too young," Chiyoh continued. "There is a chance that she will forget -- not what happened, but what she saw. Rest assured that there will inevitably be pictures, if you feel she will want to see them."

Nodding again, Hannibal pressed Mischa's face to his neck, sighing when she relaxed into his embrace. "She will always, on some level, know what happened. But you are right -- that is likely the best plan. Still, I feel she has the right to consume them as I will."

"Give her a choice, Hannibal. Do not feed them to her without asking. Perhaps she will feel as I do, and find little desire for further... vengeance beyond what it is we have already done."

Dinner that evening was far more extravagant than any that had been served at Castle Lecter before. A bottle of Amontillado sat in a cold water bath towards the middle of the table, beside an ornate bouquet of vulture feathers and bird's-foot trefoil. A symbol of predatory scavengers, and a symbol of vengeance.

"As you may have noticed, Amontillado does not generally pair with red meat," Hannibal said, uncorking the bottle. "But given the theme of tonight, I felt it was singularly appropriate."

"Mischa." Chiyoh cleared her voice, and looked pointedly at Hannibal. "Do you remember when Hannibal told you he would kill the men who invaded our home for what they did?"

Slowly, with widening eyes, Mischa nodded. "Did you? Hannibal?"

"Yes, mylima. They have taken both lives and nourishment from us. I have done the same to them. Do you understand?"

"Would you like to eat them, Mischa?" Chiyoh added, wanting to make clear to Mischa what exactly Hannibal was asking.

Looking slowly from Chiyoh's plate of fish to Hannibal's plate, which contained a seared red meat resembling lamb, Mischa's eyebrows furrowed. "No, thank you. But it is good that they are gone." Chiyoh's eyes sparkled as she served Mischa a large helping of fish.

Halfway through the silent meal, Hannibal thought he had heard the end of it, and that Mischa had sided with Chiyoh. Part of him glowed with pride that Mischa, young as she was, already developed her own sense of ethics. The rest of him wondered whether he would forever be alone in seeing death and violence the way he did.

"Hannibal?" Mischa's voice drifted, hesitant. He set down his fork. "May I have a taste of the Amontillado?"

Hannibal lifted his glass in offering, drawing back when she attempted to take it. "You may dip one of your chopsticks in it. Though you are not old enough to drink, you are old enough to have a taste of revenge."

"With you it cannot only be revenge," Chiyoh sighed.

Indeed, there had been a powerful sense of self, of beauty, of being *that coursed through Hannibal's veins as he toiled on his tableau. Bound with the same sort of rope that had secured Hannibal, Chiyoh, and Mischa to the pipes in the basement of Castle Lecter, one of Grutas's men knelt before a wastebin behind a church. Over his back was a wolf hide, purchased from a local market. Two more of the bandits, also clad in wolf hides, knelt before his chest, as if suckling at inexistent teats. Their hearts were cut out from their chests through gaping holes shaped like crosses.* Romulus and Remus, just like in Titus Andronicus. The very proof that the Romans were, in this particular context, brutal savages at heart, the objects of Hannibal's vengeance. *Not to be redeemed even after the loss of said hearts, Hannibal's tableau added.*

Thus, Hannibal emerged victorious, for the first time, from the unending hunt that only just began.

Chapter End Notes

The Amontillado was a nod to Poe's The Cask of Amontillado, a classic tale of deadly vengeance. That's kind of an important fact to know for later... ;)

Catfish

Chapter Summary

Hanners meets Will. Bev, as always, is five steps ahead of Will's silly noodle.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

On most days, Will Graham was grateful for being assigned Lt. Beverly Katz as a patrol car partner. Though she was a walking quantum conundrum given her inexhaustible energy, even on those evenings at the station when everyone would be sprawled over swivel chairs, stuffing their mouths with food and practically dumping water into themselves, she knew when Will needed quiet, and never once treated him as if he was weak or needed babying.

This afternoon, however... .

"Hey Graham!" Lt. Katz chirped, bouncing into the driver's seat. "Guess what?"

Will took a deep breath. *Be nice to her. She's done so much for you, you can at least try not being a jerk for a few minutes.* "What."

"Sooooo..." Bev sang, "Ya know that I'm a lieutenant, and you're just a... lowly police detective, yeah?" Winking at Will, she dodged as he threw a halfhearted punch in her general direction.

"What do you want *this* time?" Will sighed, more for show than anything else. Bev was the closest he had to a best friend, after all.

"Y'know we're public servants, yeah? So we gotta be there for the community." She wiggled her eyebrows, and for a moment Will was instantly transported back to those days spent in training when she'd make funny faces at him while the sergeant practically barked at her antics.

Will huffed. "Yeah, last time you said that, you almost married me off to the octogenarian mayor without my consent and *then* got me drunk enough to eat stinky tofu pudding, thinking it was... whatever it was." As if the universe was paying close attention to his woes, a maple bacon donut appeared in front of his face.

"I'm *sorry*," Bev squeaked, trying hard not to laugh. "But hey, hear me out... it's just a fish fry. We're totally on duty then, but it's on the lawn behind the municipal building."

"We're bringing security?"

Eyes wide, Beverly gaped. She could not believe how easy this was. "Yup."

Will was delighted. Normally, hours spent tracking murderers, collecting statements from witnesses and suspects, etc. were draining -- whirlwind procedural polkas interspersed with the emotions of those he encountered on the job. Dizzying.

An afternoon patrolling the municipal lawn felt like a reprieve, a golden opportunity like sunshine glinting through a pitcher of lemonade. Besides, the wooded area reigning the area in could serve as an escape, should he need one.

"Ready to knock on Mrs. Lancaster's door?" Bev buckled her seatbelt, tossing Will a napkin.

He smiled.

Social events, for Will, felt like Seurat paintings. Stay far away, and all you see are sunny afternoons spent lounging in the grass. Look closer, and the cacophony of miniscule points of color point small pistols into your eyes. So, usually, Will chose not to look, unless something jumped out at him and duty called. His instincts were almost always right.

This evening, the scene before him was charming. Strings of lights that stretched from pole to pole bracketed the expanse of the lawn reserved for the fish fry, swaying with the hot evening breeze, making everything sparkle. Though the community recreation center supplied plenty of food, grandparents brought their own batter to share, likely perfected over the course of decades through family recipes passed on time and time again. Fishmongers brought their catch of the day, and friends passed dishes of fruit and tins of pie from picnic blanket to picnic blanket. The source of the music for the night was The Sixty-Niners, a blues band composed of teens who, in addition to trying to make a particularly lewd joke, likely named their band after the grades they got in school. Bev always called them "D+" when they encountered them on the streets. They always saluted her, shouting: "Have a good one, Looie."

She'd turn to Will, smiling. "Good kids."

To enjoy the holistic view without the pinpricks of color drawing him away, away, away on the tides of other minds, Will had scaled a tree. "Aerial surveillance," he had explained to Bev, who only rolled her eyes and set off on her merry way, promising to bring him fried catfish. "You're the best," he had hollered. It was true. He really couldn't ask for a better patrol partner.

He scanned the landscape dutifully, grinning as he caught Bev nagging some beer from one of their retired colleagues, who winked at her for the transgression. *I won't tell if you won't,* the look said. Families sent children running from blanket to blanket, trading food and offering refreshments to other families. The Sixty-Niners stuck their tongues out at Bev as she passed by. Soon, however, a grill Will had never seen before snagged his eye. Whoever was using it had obviously brought it themselves, which pretty much no one ever did. Will made himself a mental note to tell Bev about it later, knowing full well she'd gossip about it with the rest of the station, and before long someone would figure out who the snob who brought their own grill was.

That proved to be unnecessary. Within a few moments, a man in a white linen suit that almost burned Will's eyes approached the brand-new grill and bent over it. The dim glow of the string lights accentuated the curves and dips of his ass. Will's gaze begged to be released from it, but he simply couldn't look away. *Damn,* he thought, as his mouth began to water in a way it hadn't before, even looking at all that food. When the man straightened up and seemed to look in his direction, Will practically fell out of the tree. The contrast between the man's leonine features, Italian-gentleman style of dress, and the rustic aura of the fish fry seemed almost comical, but somehow simultaneously in perfect harmony -- the way angels in classical paintings always looked incredulously out of place, but as if they belonged all the same.

"Boo!" Bev shouted. This time, Will literally fell out of the tree, landing with a practiced roll from shoulder to knee, entirely unscathed. "You good? Because I have some news for you."

Will glared. "Seriously, Bev? You'd think a *lieutenant* wouldn't be such a cochon, but daaaamn was I wrong," he drawled. "That news you just mentioned better be about some fried catfish."

Without breaking eye contact ("*Beverly Katz, the new champion of our station's staring contest!*"), she slung her arm upwards, flinging a warm waxpaper packet at him. "Scout's honor."

"You ruffian," Will growled in thanks, before he tore open the paper and buried his face into the succulent meat. The balance of spices was unlike any he had ever tasted before, and the texture felt as if each microfiber of the flesh was treated with care. For a moment, he almost regretted sinking his teeth into it so carelessly. "*Ohh...* ca c'est bon."

A piercing guffaw reminded him of Bev's presence. "What?" He forced himself to bark.

Bev only laughed harder. "Oh my god, if this is the sound you make at his food alone... " Will froze.

"What 'he'?"

She pointed towards the center of the bustling lawn, though neither of them was able to see anything from this angle. *The advantage of trees,* Will thought with a smirk.

"Seriously, Graham? He said you'd been staring at him. Well, obviously he was too prissy to say that... " She stood taller, puffing out her chest as if imitating a cartoon soldier. "It was more like this. Ahem. 'I do believe that your colleague has been observing me from his vantage point. It is quite kind of him to be looking after newcomers.'" Doubling over with laughter at the accuracy of her own imitation, Bev earned herself a good kick to the shins.

"I was *not* staring. I only need to look at newcomers if they're, I don't know, serial killers or some shit."

"Mmm-hmm," mumbled Bev, in the same incredulous, dangerous tone Will's grandmother had used whenever he tried to lie to her as a kid. "You gonna thank him? Before you have to

thank him for a lot more than just fish?" Before Will could shove her into the ground in retaliation, Bev gave Will a hard push, catching him just before he fell.

"Can't have you goin' up to that fine piece of ass all dirty 'cause you're too much of a wimp to get some, can we?"

This time it was Bev who landed on her butt in the dirt.

"Screw you, Lieutenant pussy-Katz. I just don't give a shit, c'est tout," Will threw over his shoulder. It was a good thing Bev was already on the ground -- her cackling alone would have brought her down anyways.

Strolling towards the center of the commotion, Will adopted his patrol stance. Surely, he couldn't have the other man knowing what he was doing -- "*good evening, sir, I was just oglin' your ass,*" -- no, that wouldn't do. Just as he was about to swing by his old colleague's blanket to ask for beer the way Bev did earlier as an excuse for passing by the well-endowed man for an up-close glimpse, a voice of liquid velvet melted him in his spot.

"*Bonsoir.*" Reflexively, Will's jaw tightened with the intake of a sharp breath. He congratulated himself for remembering his training as he turned smoothly on his heel, military-style -- perhaps a bit exaggeratedly, but it kept him steady.

"Bonjour. Ca va?" For a moment, panic threatened to push Will's heart out into a puddle of vomit at the mysterious stranger's feet. The man's Parisian French flowed and glittered the way his favorite stream did on sunny mornings, nearly tempting Will to beg him to speak again. Never had his Cajun made him so self-conscious before.

In a swift violation of his personal space, the stranger hooked a finger under Will's chin, lifting it until their eyes met.

"Enchante. I am Hannibal Lecter, M.D. I believe you must be Will Graham."

Chapter End Notes

... I know Chilton sh*t about police rankings, so please don't make me into a tableau for any mistakes there... . That being said, I'm also a born-and-raised New Jerseyan, so I also know nothing about Louisiana.

I'm Chinese-American, so I reserve the right to complain about stinky tofu.

Barracuda

Chapter Notes

> WARNING: Someone uses a homophobic slur. They get punished for it by either Will or Hanners later on, I promise. I do not condone slurs used against anyone in the LGBTQ+ community, as I myself am a member of said community.

Bonjour. Ca va? The smoky tones of the man's -- Will Graham's -- voice blew across Hannibal's mindscape, sending him flying across memories of peaty whiskey and the age-old leather of sheaths hiding from view the gleaming threats of hunting knives and bonfires built more for warmth and for cooking than for comfort and aesthetic. For a moment, he considered forgoing all intelligent discourse for the rest of his life simply to hear this voice speak, to say anything, anything at all, though he sorely hoped that his predictions of Will Graham were not wrong.

Schooling all the mirth his face threatened to betray, confining them, instead, to his gaze, Hannibal gave the polite response. *There will be plenty of time to break the sweet, tedious glaze of politeness later,* he reminded himself.

Creme brulee. Rich, indulgent, *warm* -- concealed beneath a layer of burnt sugar, to be cracked gently with a silver spoon.

Though a host of recipes flooded through his mind at the thought of Will Graham, Hannibal, for once, did not wish to include him in any of the formulae, rather, he wished to share them with him for the sake of nothing but to watch the peony lips that held the reins of those dulcet tones close around his silverware, to hear, perhaps, a sigh of pleasure. To nourish, to sate. *To please.*

"Enchante," Hannibal responded, as nonchalantly as he knew himself to be capable. "I am Hannibal Lecter, M.D. I believe you must be Will Graham." As if shy, Will lifted a well-muscled arm to scratch at the nape of his neck, releasing a wave of pheromones that seemed to swirl into Hannibal's skull, chasing away all traces of fried fish, grocery store beer, and mass-produced candies.

"Thanks, uh, for the fish," Will continued. "It was probably among the best things I've ever eaten. Actually, I take that back. Given the context of what I *have* eaten so far, that's probably an insult." Though his words conveyed a self-conscious tone, Will's gaze burned, sure and acidic, that Hannibal thought of the experiments he had done as a young child, pouring vinegar into the otherwise stable baking soda.

The bubbles that resulted threatened to burst.

"It was merely my way of thanking you for your service, Officer. For keeping watch of us all when you might have been enjoying your evening instead."

Will raised an eyebrow. "Something tells me you don't need me to keep you safe, Doc. And who says I'm not enjoying my evening?" If Hannibal himself didn't understand that this was a game, Will's remarks would have felt suspiciously like negging -- lifting him up with implied praise on one end, stripping him rudely of his mask on the other. *Perceptive, fascinating boy.*

Before Hannibal could respond, a visibly drunk woman with a reputation for advocating for the reenactment of prohibition stumbled forth, pointing an accusatory finger at Will.

"Merde! If it ain't that faggot cop corruptin' our streets..." As she stumbled backwards in her intoxicated stupor, Beverly Katz lept forward, catching her roughly by her neck and the small of her back.

"She drivin'?" Bev hollered, in no direction in particular. A young man stepped nervously forward, sweaty hands grabbing repeatedly at the hem of his own shirt.

"Nah, I am. That's my mom. Sorry, officer," he mumbled at Will. "Lieut." Bev nodded.

"Hey, Graham, you good?" She asked, patting Will on the arm. "Sorry you had to deal with that."

Eyes downcast, Will looked defiantly rueful, like a whipped hunting dog. His gaze, however, was not stagnant, but followed the drunken woman as her son practically dragged her across the grass. The movements of Will's eyes seemed to slash through her chest, her abdomen, spilling her vitals... .

A tap to Hannibal's shoulder brought him back from his reverie.

"Hey Three-Piece! I'm gonna keep patrolling, so can I entrust you with Will? Just don't, uh, make him pregnant or anything. I've got a Glock 22 right here and a Colt M4 in the car." Will blushed profusely, and swatted at Lt. Katz, only for her to dodge and practically skip away from them.

"Yeah, that would be Beverly Katz," he supplied. "Don't mind her. She might act like a little 'un, but she's a damn good officer and an even better friend."

"I heard that!" hollered Bev, earning herself an eye roll from Will.

"Tell me, then, Will, if I did not provide you with dinner to thank you for what you state is apparently unneeded protection, why is it that I chose to do so?" As if a switch had been flicked, the piercingly bright eyes shone into Hannibal's skull once more. Instinctively, Hannibal reached into the cuff of his jacket, brushing his fingers against the Seiko. The physical reminder that he still had secrets left to hide -- *perhaps for Will Graham to discover* -- eased his eyes shut in mild relief. When he opened them again, however, he realized the effort was futile.

"I don't know, Dr. Lecter..." Will trailed off, punctuating the end of Hannibal's title with a coy look through his eyelashes. "Guess I owe you one, huh?" *Game on, then.*

"Indeed, it would seem only fair," uttered Hannibal, with a sly glance of his own, "if you satisfied me just as I did you." Something within him purred with pride at the way in which he emphasized his last three words.

"And how might I achieve such a thing, Doc?"

To any outside observers, the slow circling between Hannibal and Will would have made it appear as if they were gearing up for a fight. As soon as Will's words landed, however, he stopped in anticipation, breaking the impromptu ritual. Hannibal took advantage of the stillness between them to allow the silence to thicken before he began. *The cut would be sharper, that way.*

"I thrive on company. I would like you to join me for dinner tomorrow night, if that time suits you."

"'If that time suits you'? I haven't even agreed yet," Will taunted. In response, Hannibal only lifted his chin and flexed a shoulder.

Will turned on his heel. "Tomorrow night at seven, if you know where to find me," he tossed over his shoulder. Before Hannibal could flirtatiously 'bribe' him for a clue, Will Graham was lost in the crowd, slamming the door of Hannibal's mind on him -- locking him away again, alone, without a key.

Salmon

Chapter Summary

Note:
Dearest readers -- I send you all my apologies in the usual envelope of my appreciation of (and disbelief over) your reading my work. I was sick for the greater part of the last week, and almost studied myself sick again for the final I took earlier in the evening, which messed my posting schedule up BIG time.

As an "I'm sorry" present, I will be posting an extra chapter for this week over the weekend.

Hanners prepares for his date with Will (which is coming in the next chapter!!). To be completely honest with you folks, I've never been on a date (the woes of being 18 and a late bloomer), so this might not be 100% realistic. Please give constructive criticism in the comments... thank you!

Hannibal's mind often felt like a control room of sorts -- he had worked hard to furnish it thoroughly with controls over all aspects of his life, screens of perception to monitor his plans as they unfolded. Sometimes he opened the hatch to let in the air, to pick a flower and twist it between his fingers, to gaze at a museum wall. But when the hospital closed and Mischa and Chiyoh went to sleep in Paris and all the music stopped, Hannibal's inner center of operations chilled, laid out on a pillow like a bottle of the finest champagne set to chill in a bed of ice, waiting -- *waiting*.

For what?

As the clock struck five, however, he almost wished that he had known to savor the previous night, his last before a pair of blue eyes that saw everything and shifted about to avoid seeing *anything* assaulted the steel hatch of his thoughts and let in a light he knew would forever keep him from sleep.

The light showed him the dust that flew about in his chambers, and turned them into flakes of gold, the glimmers of dew. If only he could bask in it.

Tomorrow night at seven, if you know where to find me, Will had challenged, a smirk both playful and frightening bidding him good night. Though the epiphanic moment of first meeting Will's gaze had made Hannibal thank fate for leading him to find such a fascinating creature, like with everything else in his life that mattered, he did not mind going to the ends of the earth to find Will again, for himself. *For both of us.*

It was easy enough. Will had smelled keenly of the bayou, of swampy waters, of cypress, of the faint sweetness of Louisiana Irises. His largely avoidant nature suggested that he lived alone, and his ill-fitting socks were clearly purchased in a twelve-pack from Target. *A modest, utilitarian home by the water, then.* As he sliced the Ora King salmon into near-translucent slices, Hannibal allowed himself a smile wider than he had afforded anyone for the better part of the month, privately, just for himself. He was sure that this small victory would be short-lived, if Will Graham's mind was as sharp as his tongue suggested it was.

In the corner of the counter, the irises Hannibal had ordered fresh from the market earlier in the morning screamed violet against the tile backsplash. *How fortunate you are,* he thought, *to live in beauty, and to wilt only in the joyous climax of your life, as you are held by the most brilliant creature there is to behold, as you capture his attention with your essence in your dying moments.* A phantom pang of envy thrummed up Hannibal's sternum, a sensation so viscerally strange but so conceptually familiar that it left Hannibal reeling.

For a moment, he imagined wrapping himself in satin and delivering himself, bleeding, into Will's hands, pictured Will's nose brushing over his rapidly convulsing Adam's apple, before touching his lips to Hannibal's already exposed heart. A thrill of ecstasy seized it just as Will's teeth did, and Hannibal lifted trembling hands to offer more of it up to the altar of his hunger, only for them to be gently pressed back against his sides.

I wish to consume it when it is still yours to give, still mine to take. The world pulsed once, hot and suffocating, before it went dark --

Fists clenched at his sides, Hannibal opened his eyes, breathing heavily in a manner that he knew would -- should -- slow the violent thumping of his heart. He reached for his phone.

"Hello, Chiyoh."

"Hello, Hannibal. What is wrong?" Apart from the moments they had spent huddled tightly together with Mischa for warmth all those decades ago, and the hugs they exchanged at the airport when Hannibal first departed for Johns Hopkins, this was the first time Chiyoh ever heard Hannibal breathe -- and so erratically, at that.

Hannibal chuckled, an ugly, leering sound tearing from his throat. "I fear you will no longer have any mercy left for me should I tell you." Chiyoh's eyes narrowed.

"Is it my mercy you are losing, or Mischa's? Should I go get her? She is..." The sound of a door creaking and then shutting softly echoed over the phone. "... asleep. It seems that her studies have exhausted her." Picturing Mischa as a toddler, nestled in the crook of his arm with her face buried in a plush sparrow, briefly eased the tides of Hannibal's panic. Even so, he clung to the evenness of Chiyoh's tone, the same voice that had remained steady even as they fled Castle Lecter.

"Do not wake her, then." Hannibal closed his eyes again, unfurling his fists. "Tell her in the morning that I did, indeed, go to the fish fry she was so eager for me to attend. While I was there I had the pleasure of meeting my new neighbors..."

"Hannibal." As swiftly as her katana, Chiyoh cut through his self-soothing rambling. "What happened at this... 'fish fry'? You sound, how would you say it -- *unmoored*. It is not like you." He could practically hear her eyebrows reacquaint themselves.

"I met someone who appears to have such an effect on me," he admitted at length. "He seems to sense my secrets without knowing them."

Chiyoh sighed, softly huffing out as great a laugh as he ever knew her to afford anyone. "And yet you are not afraid for your safety. You know, I think Mischa would tell you to buy flowers."

"I already did," retorted Hannibal. "Irises native to Louisiana, symbolizing valor and wisdom -- they smell of him, and he of them."

"Yes, and they also represent hope and trust," Chiyoh finished. "You forget that I know of the language of the flowers." In her own manner, she was *taunting* him. Indignation brimmed over in Hannibal's chest, pushing out his lower lip with its pressure.

"I do not hope, I anticipate reasonably," he insisted, doing his best to exhale slowly, evenly. "And I do not trust easily, as you should know by now. It seems that he does not, either, though for far more interesting reasons."

The glossy tendrils of Chiyoh's hair rustled into the speaker as she shook her head, picturing Hannibal driving himself into a frenzy over this mysterious stranger. "Do not kill him, then." A long pause seemed to indicate Hannibal's assent.

"I will not."

"Good," said Chiyoh, smiling. "Early tomorrow morning I must fly an Airbus Ecureuil to Lourdes. Good night, Hannibal. I will tell Mischa about this catastrophe of yours."

"Thank you, Chiyoh," Hannibal replied, long after a soft *beep* signaled the departure of Chiyoh's remote presence. As he breathed in the already-plated salmon tartare, ready to be packed into a thermal tote with a pack of ice, a rushing flood of anticipation invaded him, swirling around his limbs, washing over his skin.

This time, Hannibal stood his ground, and remained safely and blissfully ashore.

Gar

Chapter Summary

Guys, I know I'm a handful of hours late posting this, since I promised y'all a weekend update... I'm sorry. Further apologies about the brevity of this chapter.

Warning: I wrote this chapter between cram-paper-writing-and-procrastination sessions, so... read at your own risk.

NOTE: More apologies. I meant to make this the date chapter, but welllll it ended up like this. NEXT CHAPTER WILL BE THE DATE, I PROMISE!

Earlier in the day

As the sun began to set and the coolness of night began to relieve the dogs of the day's heat, Will found himself fixating on his watch. *Relax, Graham, he probably took it as a joke. He's not actually going to show up.* But if the gaze that blazed with amusement, with *delight,* like a roaring fire stoked again after years and years of laying dormant, gave any indication to what might happen that night -- *but he might.*

Will couldn't remember the last time he had felt so on edge about someone beyond the tedious pain of seeing too much within them -- that now, it was anticipation, and wondering whether to anticipate at all that made him anxious, was jarringly inconceivable to him. He usually avoided people. "Why?" Katz had once asked. "I bet you're able to figure out all sorts of interesting things about them. Like a game with yourself."

Though she had meant well, Will had winced, falling into silence for the rest of their ride back to the station. *A gift you can't refuse or store away isn't a gift at all, it's a curse.* Indeed, what had once been a confusing, harrowing roller-coaster ride through adult emotions in his childhood quickly staled into an unending cycle of absorbing the same miseries, albeit from different people. Job stress. Marital dissatisfaction. Loneliness. The cases at the homicide unit were the worst -- there was usually anger, so much anger -- cheating spouses, drug deals gone wrong, retaliation for abuse, anger against society and those in it -- and so much despair.

Dr. Lecter, however. Behind the handsome face that made Will's eyes widen and his pupils dilate when it smiled, Dr. Lecter lived within the bounds of carefully constructed walls. Within them, the echoes of dancing slivers of color seemed to call for him, beckon to him. *Try and catch me. See what you find.* Equally, however, Will wondered what Dr. Lecter saw in him, of him. Surely he could not have seen into Will's mind, seen the blood he had so thoroughly cleansed from his hands. Besides, few people ever bother to notice the awkward

homicide detective hiding in the trees above a lively community gathering, let alone ask his partner to deliver him home-cooked food.

I thrive on company.

Interesting. A man as clearly wealthy and accomplished as Dr. Lecter was could not fail to obtain company of any broad category, as far as Will knew. To Lecter, somehow, he was unique. Will itched to figure out *why.*

Will Graham: [4:03 PM] Katz, can you watch my dogs tonight?

Lt.KatzIsBadass: [4:05 PM] YESSS OMG our lil willy g's gettin' some!! it's dr. cheekbones, right? u owe me one

Will Graham: [4:07 PM] [eyeroll] Yeah, I'll owe you one if you watch my dogs for the night.

Lt.KatzIsBadass: [4:08 PM] sure, snoball. at least ur dogs aren't as icy as u. If y'all ever get puppies im calling dibs.

Will Graham: [4:13 PM] You know they're neutered.

Lt.KatzIsBadass: [4:15 PM] never say never. im coming over

With the dogs gone, the silence in the house became a blank canvas -- and Dr. Lecter's voice, apparently, became the brush. *Tell me, then, Will, if I did not provide you with dinner to thank you for what you state is apparently unneeded protection, why is it that I chose to do so?*

A dinner for a dinner. That one was for Will, but this one... *this one's for him.* The idea that Lecter intended to take from Will whatever aspects of his company pleased him, tonight, with the aquiline syllables drowned in a coating of velvet tones, sent a thrill rippling down Will's spine. Remembering the handshake they had shared, however, doused him with cold dissatisfaction -- though he could picture the strong, warm hand sliding down from gripping his wrist before taking his own, then inching slowly away, brushing tantalizingly over his fingertips, the phantom tingles that thrummed through his nerves paled in comparison to what he had felt -- and craved feeling again. It was, beyond a doubt, the most *intentional* handshake he had ever given or received. It was not a mere formality, but an exploration, an introduction, a promise to meet again.

Indeed, it would only seem fair if you satisfied me as I did you.

"Oh, I fully intend to," Will muttered to the unadorned walls of his empty house, which echoed his words in assent.

"Time to go fishing."

Koi

Chapter Summary

> It's here, my lovelies. The date I promised you. I hope it lives up to expectations... . This is The Date Part I, so to be continued...
>
> Fun story: Before Plathianglass knew they liked girls or ANYBODY, they really, really wanted to kiss this girl's hand. It never happened, so that repressed urge got shoved into this fic. Kinda.
>
> This chapter was... dashed out. It's unbetaed. I'm sorry, folks, I just procrastinate too much. That being said... I know nothing about the fis of Louisiana.

The clicking of the dress shoes he hadn't seen in years quickened as Will practically hurtled himself from one end of the small house to the other, his legs carrying him seemingly of their own accord. Suddenly, he stopped in the space where the kitchen met his makeshift living room, devoid of all furniture but for one armchair and seven dog beds.

Will cupped his face in both hands and rubbed at it, fingers digging into his eye sockets. He sighed. "C'est bete, non?" No response came -- no scratching, no whining, no barking. Nothing. *Merde.*

Cerebrally, Will knew that this was just a dinner. A favor owed for a favor gained. He had locked his cellar and returned his filet knives to his tackle box, where no one would think twice about their presence. Just in case, he had wiped them down with alcohol wipes and then ran them under the kitchen faucet. The minute flex of the doctor's jaw, however... the path his gaze traced along the rude woman’s torso, along her neck -- *gutting her,* Will thought -- the fascinated shock in Lecter's eyes as they spoke... this was not just a dinner, not just a date.

An exploration, an evaluation. Seeking answers to a long-neglected question. And those hands, those fucking hands... .

Before his legs could send him on another lap across the house, three firm, resounding knocks stopped Will's thoughts in their tracks, dismissing them into the air. Even as he turned the doorknob to admit his guest, Will found his free hand flexing, as if in preparation for grasping another tight within its clutches, foreign fingers spreading his own apart.

His gaze fell upon the doctor's tie.

"Bonswa," Will barely mustered, the quick whisper just frantic enough to be heard.

Beneath his smothering suit, Hannibal shivered, the raspiness in Will's tone hinting at a tryst, now, later, never... but still a tryst, at some point in time. *No, not now.* He clutched tighter at

the small cooler tucked beneath one arm, nearly squishing the bouquet sitting delicately atop it.

Consonants folding into docile herbivorean ridges rather than their usual formidable peaks, Hannibal smiled. "Bonsoir." Neither moved to go in, with Will perched in the doorway, elevated by a few inches over the porch, and Hannibal standing directly eye-to-eye with him, gazing insistently at the eyes pointed doggedly at his own chest, as if the heart squeezing and easing itself again was some odd specimen, a strange beast stirring in a cave.

Determined not to be examined without being permitted to make observations of his own, Hannibal took Will's hand in his, bending over as if to kiss it. The palpitations in the wrist sped, and Will's gaze, as he had hoped, finally met his eyes, questioning. *Do not worry,* the responding smirk said. Will closed his eyes, as the pair of luscious lips...

The nudge of Hannibal's pointed nose met the back of Will's hand instead, nuzzling over it gently before a deep intake of breath ruffled the fine hairs along its terrain, eliciting a breath of Will's own. In a split second, the warmth that enveloped his hand faded completely, as its source straightened again.

Hannibal, with another slight bow, held the still-dewy bouquet of irises out and released it into Will's loose, tentative grasp. "Now, shall we?"

By the time Hannibal had laid out napkins, glasses, a bottle, and two plates of salmon tartare, Will could no longer recognize his dining table. Strangely enough, against the backdrop of his hand-made cypress dining table, the elaborate spread shone and gained a rustic charm -- an unlikely but perfect fit.

Noting Will's aversion to eye contact, Hannibal sacrificed the traditional dinner date configuration in favor of sitting down beside Will. When their shoulders bumped gently, cushioned by Will's ironed flannel shirt and Hannibal's layers and layers of tailoring, the small chuckle Will let out into the space between them assured Hannibal that he had made the right decision.

"Salmon tartare, with basil and lemongrass," he explained, gesturing vaguely at the two plates with a fluorish.

Will laughed again, soft and content, devoid of any intention to mock. "King salmon. Didn't source this one locally, did you?" Hannibal smiled.

"Pink salmon is indeed more readily available. They symbolize friendship and new romance." At this, Will tilted his head inquisitively, a smirk quirking the corner of his mouth.

"Well, then, doctor, I'm guessin' the King salmon is neither. Should I be wounded that you aren't here for friendship or a new romance?" The softness of Will's lips flexed as he spoke. Hannibal considered catching them in their writhing, gently consuming them until all doubt on Will's part dissipated into --

"No, Will," he interjected quickly, as if caught off guard. "The King represent grandeur and power." Will burst into loud laughter, knee bumping against the side of Hannibal's leg, shoulders fluttering like butterfly wings.

"Ah -- I'm sorry, are you calling *me* powerful and -- majestic? Merde, Doctor... "

Beautiful, fascinating, exasperating *boy.*

"No, I--" Hannibal tried again.

Will practically *giggled,* turning in his chair to point a finger at the tip of Hannibal's nose in a gesture that would have been his last had he been someone else. "Owwww, doc, that hurt," he taunted. "Wanna fix that wound o' mine, now?" Hannibal was dumbstruck. Competing urges to seize Will in his arms, to kneel at his feet, to assure him that he meant it warred in his head with a chaos he had not seen in months. His desires were usually manageable and easily contained in his plans -- and easily satisfied that way, too.

"What I meant, Will," he began, "is that I see something powerful and majestic in you. How you choose to grant others that privilege is entirely in your own grasp."

Will's amusement hardened, roughening around the edges. "Then why the salmon tartare, doctor? Layin' yourself bare before me, while the whole of me is still kept from you... can hardly be fair, right?" This time, it was Hannibal's turn to chuckle.

"You will find, my dear boy," he whispered, cutting slowly into Will's portion of the fish, "that I am quite eager to have you bared to me in your entirety. And when I do..." Before he finished the sentence, he pushed a forkful of salmon into Will's inviting mouth, watching keenly as his eyes closed at the flood of bright flavors. *A taste, barely an appetizer, for the true meal is yet to come.*

Standing, he took the bottle of amontillado, uncorking it swiftly with a pocket knife he produced from the cooler. Will ate calmly as he did so, watching as the amber liquid swirled into the glasses.

"Amontillado," explained Hannibal, simply, as he slide one glass towards Will.

"Y'know, Haaaaanibal," Will drawled, eyes flicking up to meet Hannibal's, "it's almost as if you're threatening me. The salmon, and now the Amontillado? Gonna wall me up in a cellar after plyin' me with delicacies? Don't tell me *your* family crest is also serpents with 'no one treads on me with impunity' carved over it." Noticing Hannibal's brows furrowing, Will held up a hand, commanding his worries to stay in check. "The irises, however... hope, doc? A royal purple? Makes me think you're lookin' for a royal consort or somethin'."

Fingers lacing around his glass, Hannibal stared into the golden sherry. "I do indeed have a family crest carved with snakes, but I admit that I likely chose the Amontillado because it pairs rather nicely with your accent." *Will,* Will's mind added, wanting to hear the doctor's rich lisp curl around his name again, serpentine, to wind closer and tighter and never let go.

"Hmm," he hummed. "My accent? Is that an insult, doctor?" *Ah. Doctor, not Hannibal. Two can play at this game.*

Hannibal nodded minutely. "Whereas your accent has a rich, aquiline smoothness, mine is rather like cut steel." Beneath the table, a sharp *click* bounced from the floorboards, just before a socked foot perched beside Hannibal's own. Just as he did decades ago, as a boy fleeing in the snow, Hannibal craved the warmth. *Ever the fisherman, drawing me in.* He bid himself focus on the flavors on his tongue, on the slow destruction of the slivers of fish in his mouth to a pulp, to be entirely dissolved by his being.

Will lifted his glass, as if nothing had happened. "If it really was like cut steel, it'd be like the art deco balustrades of Paris. Just iconic enough to be looked at, and often, but not so imposing that it draws inconvenient attention." His foot remained agonizingly still, just a millimeter away. Hannibal closed his eyes, opening them again slowly as he turned towards Will.

"This contradicts what you said about me earlier, Will, that you felt that I do not require your protection. If we are to abide by your previous statements, I am precisely the kind of person to fare well with inconvenient attention, and perhaps even to desire it. Care to explain this paradox, then?" Shaking his head almost dismissively, Will shrugged.

"You're the paradox. The duty of explaining, Haaaanibal, lies solely with you."

Successfully, irreversibly hooked, Hannibal finally slid his foot to rest against Will's, grinning his defeat when a toe inched towards his instep, stroking gentle circles into the tender flesh.

Mackerel

Chapter Summary

> Guys, guys, guys... I am so sorry this is late. Let's just say it's a rough week, academically speaking. So, short chapter this week... I promise a longer one next week.

You're the paradox. Something perched just atop Hannibal's diaphragm thudded, low and deep, lurching when a pair of blue, wine-darkened eyes lifted to meet his own. He took a slow breath, swirling it in his lungs like he did the sherry in his mouth, before speaking.

"A paradox. What a shame, then, dear Will." Seeing Will's smirk falter at the endearment, Hannibal smiled. "When the puzzle is solved at last, when all is said and done -- what will you do then? Will you tire of me and saunter off to seek another, to further exercise that delicious wit of yours?"

Beneath the table, Will's toes trailed from Hannibal's ankle up the inner side of his calf in retaliation. "Some puzzles require two to solve, Hannibal. It'd be really helpful to know what one's *partner*'s mind is like in such scenarios. I mean, you've got this whole mysterious European thing going on, but I don't fall for that shit."

Partner. The warmth of the amontillado trickling down Hannibal's throat only seemed to register then, seeping into crevices that had been cold and empty for as long as he could remember.

"You sound as if we are solving each other, then, as a means of taking inventory of our resources." Mischief tickled Hannibal's gaze, as he sat up straighter in mock formality, holding out a hand for Will to shake. Quickly, as if he was afraid he would change his mind, Will grabbed it and laid a hasty kiss to Hannibal's knuckles. Glancing to his side, Hannibal realized that the bottle was empty.

"Presumptuous of you to assume you're the partner I'm talking about, Doc."

Hannibal chuckled. "Presumptuous of *you,* then, Officer, to kiss my hand." For a moment, they simply sat, looking at one another, Hannibal enjoying the further reddening of Will's wine-flushed face, Will subtly noting the way in which Hannibal's fingers caressed his knuckles, where Will had pecked at him earlier. *The things we could do if only you could see me.*

"Speaking of paradox... " Will began again, fingers encircling the neck of the bottle, as he disengaged his legs from Hannibal's. "Why did you really choose to bring the Amontillado, Hannibal? We both know that it's better suited for chicken and game."

Cunning boy. The thrumming at the center of Hannibal's chest began again, this time almost to the point of ringing out like the tones of a glass armonica. Images of his celebratory meal of Grutas and his men flashed dizzyingly before his eyes. Amontillado. Bird's-foot trefoil. Wolf hides. *Vengeance.*

Looking into Hannibal's eyes, Will recognized something he himself had felt time and time again, only to lose the morning afterwards, when the high wore off and there was no one to tell, and the media sensationalized it all and *no one* understood -- victory. It wasn't the sort that was shouted to the masses, or announced from the peaks of mountains, but the sort enjoyed quietly before the lapping of flames, the sort that consumed all, that loomed over funeral pyres.

"A puzzle that betrays its own secret would surely lose the interest of its player, would it not?"

Will nodded. "We'll wait and see, then." Beneath the table, Hannibal's socked foot approached his once more, though this time, without preamble, it nudged into its rightful place against his instep.

"I look forward to it, darling boy," Hannibal whispered. "In the meantime... dessert?"

Bass

Chapter Summary

Hey folks. Finals are finally over (no pun intended), so I'm back. I am so sorry for the delay. This work isn't abandoned, I promise.

Warning: we have a murder tableau in this one. I'll add a dividing line when it begins and another when it's over so y'all know where to skip, if you want to skip it.

Note: I know nothing about how the bureaucratic structure of police homicide departments work. Please don't @ me.

Will woke suddenly from a shallow sleep that barely consumed his form, let alone carried him away. There was banging on his door, and stern, rapid instructions blaring through his walkie-talkie.

"Graham. Graham, where are you?"

"Graham. Mrs. Aguillard's been murdered, we're estimating six hours ago. You're needed at the scene immediately."

"Graham."

"Graham."

"Graham."

He contemplated smashing his radio on the floor, to walk away from the pesky, banal, routine demands of his job, to wallow, perhaps in anger. Mrs. Aguillard had wronged him, had wronged Hannibal -- *Hannibal.* And now she would never learn her lesson.

Driving towards the crime scene, fury sloshed hotly against the perimeter of his heart, though his face cooled with each passing utility pole. He thought of Hannibal again, of the dizzying victory in his eyes when he had served the Amontillado the night before. If only that rush lasted him longer than his morning hangovers. If only he ever truly won.

Before he could pull his keys out of ignition, Lt. Katz flung open his door and pulled him by the bicep towards the huddle of agents bracing themselves despite the heat.

"I have Graham," she announced, as if it wasn't already evident, with the same tone of voice as one would use to state that one is indeed in possession of a screwdriver.

Mrs. Aguillard's brain had been removed, rather, in its place, was a cylindrical cut-out of the Southern Baptist Convention Handbook. *Mindless.*

The heart, so carefully removed from the body that it appeared never to have belonged there in the first place, sat in a dish held out by lifeless hands. Its insides were hollowed out, spooned onto the side of the plate, and in its place was a large shard of smoky glass. *Heartless.*

The body was dressed in the same clothes in which it wore the night of the fish fry. *You did not die today. Your fate was sealed days ago, when you earned yourself my judgment... this heart, offered up to the viewer, isn't yours, since you have shown so clearly that you are undeserving of one. Rather, it symbolizes my own, already out of my control, to be taken or to be rejected. This is my design.*

Three days ago. Smoky glass. Amontillado.

Flashes of the fish fry, his date with Hannibal, and parts of the crime scene spiraled before Will's mind's eye. Mrs. Aguillard seemed to sit up, holding the plate with her heart displayed in the center towards him, until her features blurred and morphed into Hannibal's, though the voice that called at the back of his head -- *"Graham. Graham? Graham!"* -- was undeniably Beverly Katz's.

His head throbbed.

"Will. Will, are you okay?" A firm hand shook his shoulder, as a curtain of dark black hair fell into the periphery of his vision. *Bev.*

"Y-yeah, I... I'm fine," he stammered, numbly, nodding like an imbecile.

"Send him home," Jack Crawford's voice boomed. "He can't think like this." *As if I'm not in the room.*

Allowing himself to sink into the rare stillness that came with being unfeeling and unthinking, Will followed Lt. Katz's guiding hand towards her car, and sat like a wooden doll all the way home.

One protection offered by being a monster in the common sense, to Will Graham, was that that made one's own self the most terrifying, unconceivable, unpredictable entity in the nearby ecosystem. The one-time killers who murdered out of jealousy, out of selfishness, even out of curiosity -- they weren't monsters, not really. They were simply sheep with lower impulse control. But this one, Mrs. Aguillard's killer... this person had killed this way before. *Might* kill this way again, though it wasn't a compulsion, rather, a practiced response to a stimulus -- a perverse *inspiration.*

When he'd woken again from a fitful, image-saturated sleep, Jack had demanded that he give him answers, motives, leads, suspects. He'd lied.

"Why was the heart cut out?"

"The killer was in love with her. They wanted it for themselves."

"Lt. Katz said that it was surgically removed. Barely any trace of a cut."

"... wanted to show her that it was theirs all along."

"Why the glass in the heart?"

"That... that's hard to tell, Jack. Could be something they shared together, could be... *merde*, how would I know?

"... thank you, Will."

Jack had stood, tipping his hat in farewell, before practically flying from his porch back to the station. Alone again, Will blinked, trying simultaneously to convince himself that this was real, and that it wasn't. He had defended a killer. Another killer. The one that took *his* victim before he had a chance to do so himself... and left him a message.

Betta

Chapter Summary

Our boys get a setback... but don't worry, I promise it's going to end up a push forward!!

Features more Mischa and Chiyoh... to give Hanners headaches about Will. :) The Chiyoh in this 'verse is a little Bedelia-esque, but minus the bitchiness. She genuinely cares for Han in this one.

Chapter Notes

When I call Will Bev's partner, or vice versa, I mean as police officers in the homicide unit. Their relationship in this fic, and in basically every other Hannibal verse, is purely platonic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal lowered his binoculars, arms flexing in relief at the loss of the weight. From afar, it was difficult to see Will's face, much more so to see his eyes. For a moment, he wondered why he allowed himself this excursion in the first place -- on some level, he had known that it would reveal nothing to him, resulting only in unnecessary anxiety -- no -- *anticipation*.

His phone rang, a rude klaxon he was thus far too busy to replace with a pleasanter, more tasteful ringtone. *Mischa,* the screen flashed. Pulling out of the empty parking lot, he pressed a button on his steering wheel, putting her on speakerphone.

"Brolis," she greeted, practically breathless. "Have you... because I... I thought... "

He smiled. "I have, dear Mischa -- the memory of a dinner with him alone left me itching to give him proof my adoration. How are you? How is Chiyoh?" An intake of breath on her end warned him of her answer.

"Since next week's graduation, I thought maybe you could come over earlier than we planned, so we can all spend some time together... celebrating, you know, before the first day of work comes to plague me... " Knowing her as he did, he could practically see her playful grimace before his eyes. "Maybe you can bring a date!"

Ah, Mischa.

"Then you shall see me the day after tomorrow, cherie. As for inviting someone else along... it is a bit early for that, don't you think? Furthermore, this is your graduation. It would likely be better for me to focus my attentions on you, our successful young scholar." Mischa huffed.

"That's what Chiyoh said," she muttered. Smirking, Hannibal lowered his voice, until it was barely a whisper. "Ah, was she good?"

"HANNIBAL!" The shriek, nearly enough to implode the structure of his car, was proof enough that his popular culture reference was finally, in Mischa's words, "on point".

"Am I truly to believe, dear sister, that it is acceptable for you to worm your decidedly unwelcome way into my love life, or lack thereof, while the same is not acceptable for me?"

"Not when your assumptions are unfounded," she pouted. "Don't think I didn't hear about that enlightening chat you had with Chiyoh about him."

Though still teasing, her tone had veered closer to being serious -- *do not do anything reckless,* it implored. *Let the right ones in, and only when you're sure.*

"I think he was quite fond of my Seiko watch."

A sigh of relief.

"I am glad, then, Brolis... it seems that Chiyoh wishes to speak to you."

A soft sound that resembled, suspiciously, the brushing of a hand against someone's hair, followed by Chiyoh's characteristically irritated huff that seemed to precede every conversation, no matter the topic, indicated her presence.

"Hannibal." He knew she was nodding, bent over slightly in the traditional greeting they had learned as children.

"Chiyoh," greeted Hannibal, dipping his own head, the gesture small enough for him to keep his eyes on the road. "I have told Mischa that I will see you both in two days."

She grunted her approval. "Good. Spend the two days before your flight with him." That took him off guard -- Chiyoh was always direct, but seldom sudden or so seemingly tactless with her approach to topics that interested her.

"Did he enjoy your gift, this man who reminds you of irises?" At this, Hannibal let out a long-suffering sigh, fully conveying his feelings about his family's teasing.

"I do not know," he admitted, turning into his driveway. "I attempted to... look at his face as he received it, though I was unable to do so." To any other ears, this would sound like a romantic lament of the tedious, *common* variety, he knew. Better safe than sorry on the phone. "I fear that spending time with him now would pressure him, if he knows that I am his secret admirer. If he does not, perhaps it would impart to him that information before he is ready to receive it."

Chiyoh tutted, the sound barely masked by the click of Hannibal's front door. "You wish to show him the" -- a cough -- "*amorous beast* hidden beneath your suits. But beyond the most memorable moments of our lives, most people desire a partner during the simpler parts of life, too." In the background, Hannibal heard the tell-tale crackle of chicken being fried.

"Yo-yo, dinner!" Mischa called, earning an exaggerated groan in complaint at the nickname. He closed his eyes, slowly letting himself picture a warm evening spent in his kitchen in a similar fashion, but with a succulent cut of *pork* and a set of darkening blue eyes watching him as he cooked, a head of soft curls nuzzling into his neck in stark contrast to the biting remarks made in response to his own attempts at jest. *Some day.*

"... Hannibal?" Blinking, he found himself once again alone in his foyer, phone pressed to his ear. Though he had never succeeded in picturing someone like Will Graham in his life, years spent alone took his mind away from the moments of familiarity creatures unlike him enjoyed. Reminders of their existence once pained him, cutting beneath his affected indifference, but now they filled him with a warm hope, sweeter than amontillado.

"Yes, Chiyoh. Enjoy your dinner. I will see you soon."

"Farewell, Hannibal. Be safe," she responded, swiftly, as another call from Mischa rang from a distance, leaving Hannibal alone in his otherwise empty house.

"Sooo, Graham, on a brighter topic," Beverly Katz drawled, slapping her partner on the shoulder. "How was Dr. Grillades? Get a taste of 'em yet, tu sais?"

"Casse-toi," Will hissed.

"Aww, didn't get any yet? Shoulda figured he'd be the type to do some slooooowwwww romancin'." As if he didn't get the idea, she flipped her hair over her shoulder, blinking at him at an alarming pace. He rolled his eyes. *You don't know the* half *of it,* Will wanted to mutter, despite knowing better.

"He's a little traditional," he said instead. "Brought me dinner. Cooks better than the chefs in all the local restaurants here."

Swiftly, and in pure Bev fashion, she seized his left hand, pinching his ring finger until there was practically a bruise there. "Marry. Him. Now."

Will's phone, ever so seldom his savior, lit up with a new notification, emitting a small buzz.

"Is it him?" Bev asked, trying her best to raise only one eyebrow. Ignoring her, Will simply unlocked his phone, willing himself not to hope --

[4:32] Hannibal Lecter*: Will, I have just received news from my sister that she wishes to celebrate her graduation early. I will be away for a week following Friday. If it is not too presumptuous, I hoped that perhaps we might have a picnic together by the stream behind your home. If you are amenable to this idea, do let me know when you are available. Yours, HL*

Face lighting up without his permission, Will turned towards his partner. "Happy now, Bev? I've got a date."

Chapter End Notes

If the amontillado references are getting cringy, I promise they won't appear for at least the next chapter.

Guppy

Chapter Summary

> Folks. I am SO sorry for not writing for so long -- major... things happened in my life, so I had to prioritize taking care of myself. I don't guarantee that I'm back for good, but I do promise that I'm going to keep writing. This fic isn't abandoned. I'll finish it, promise. Just... when life gives me the gift of time. Or when I give it to myself by procrastinating. Either one.

... Yours, H.L.

Lips curling softly into a smirk, Will rolled his eyes into the fluorescent void of his phone.

[5:34] Will Graham: *So you're mine now, huh, doctor?*

[5:36] Hannibal Lecter: *The recognition of one's possessions usually involves touch or sight, Will.*

Wait. Was Hannibal...

A hand holding out a heart.

A shard of smoky glass.

Will raised a foot as if to tread over the tall grass in the field. *See me...*

The world crashed back into focus as Will blinked, sloshing coffee over the sterile white plastic surface of his counter. For a moment, Hannibal's anger and dismissal were his own, each vindictive detail of the tableau arranged carefully by his own hand. *This is how I would have done it,* he realized, *save for the bottle fragment.* Of course, to live in an area for years on end, to work there and show his face, Will had to maintain subtlety -- but this. This yanked the veil from his face, even though he had never performed for an audience before. *See me, as I see you. A game. Hide and seek. Quid pro quo.*

Will's smirk quickly grew fangs.

[5:41] Will Graham: *Blackmailing me into this picnic using yourself as a ransom, I see.*

[5:43] Hannibal Lecter: *The pleasure of one's own company in such a capacity is generally a simpler price to pay than any other bartering card. In this case, however, the benefits I reap will tower significantly over any sacrifices made on your part.*

[5:44] Will Graham: *Impoverished for my presence. You must be suffering.*

[6:21] Hannibal Lecter: *Do excuse the lateness of my response. I was rather busy cooking our lunch.*

[6:23] Hannibal Lecter: *And indeed, I will not deny my present state. But I have also heard that suffering, once given a partner, may turn agonizingly sweet.*

Alone in his kitchen, damp fingers curled almost lovingly around his phone, Hannibal smiled -- a small, tentative thing -- to himself. *Perhaps I have said too much, moved too quickly.* For the first time since his youth, he felt small in his large, cavernous space.

What if -- what if strong fisherman's arms wrapped around him, protective and possessive, rough fingers entwined with his own smoother ones? What if he felt another heartbeat at his back besides his own? A warmth --

[6:28] Will Graham: [.jpg file] *Proud of me, Hannibal? And "our lunch"? This really is a hostage situation, with quite the time sensitivity.*

[6:29] Will Graham: *Yeah, you can go ahead and be sweet all you want, cooking for me and all that. But I, for one, will bring the agony.*

[6:30] Hannibal Lecter: *How merciful of you, then, to rid my suffering of its solitude -- despite your clear cruelty to your own body and palate.*

A questioning sound from Winston brought Will's attention away from his phone. "Why are you grinning," the wet-eyed gaze seemed to ask. Since he couldn't seem to bring the corners of his lips down, Will snarled a bit, trying -- and failing -- to straighten them.

"I don't know, boy," he soothed, as if trying to buy time from a small child while thinking of something else. "Daddy's just... never done this before. Not like this." Winston huffed, and the image of his younger self cradling a puppy, left behind by all the other children flashed to the forefront of his mind. *Not anymore,* he thought, far too smugly for his usual range of comfort. *They weren't particularly interesting playmates, anyway.*

[6:47] Will Graham: *You'll see, Dr. Lecter, that the vast majority of my cruelty isn't geared towards myself.*

Somewhere further inland, a creeping blush forced a particular doctor to choke on his wine.

Clownfish

Chapter Summary

> Finally... a second date and a smooch because I PROMISED Clary. AKA Glass has had enough of adult responsibilities, and... dashed this out as a result.
>
> Some of this is based on my own interactions... though let's just say that said interactions didn't lead to the happy ending that my fics always do, nor were they anywhere near as life-changing to the people involved.

"You know Chiyoh's right, yeah?" Mischa asked, and Hannibal imagined her with the same head tilt that so often accompanied Chiyoh's unimpressed glare. *Beyond the most memorable moments of our lives, most people desire a partner during the simpler parts of life, too.*

"And are you aware of how pleased I am to hear that, given how seldom you say it?" He had no option but to quip back, to deflect, feeling unmoored at the very idea of Will Graham to the point that speaking of him finally understand how his ignorant fellow residents must have felt when cold-called by their mentors.

"Han."

"Mischa."

"You know it's not enough to just cook for him."

"... yes."

"It's not just about things related to the most taboo elements of your character." The more Mischa spoke, the more Hannibal felt like a young child being chided by a parent, despite his own role in MIscha's upbringing.

"I am pleased to hear that Chiyoh is such a positive influence on you -- " A mock-exasperated sigh from the other end stopped him mid-sentence.

"Hannibal." Another huffed breath.

"... do tell dear Chiyoh that she can have your hand in marriage if that will keep you from interfering in my own affairs." There. That seemed to do it -- Mischa's admonishments quickly gave way to giggles, which echoed back in Chiyoh's soft laugh. Seizing the opportunity, Hannibal murmured a quick "good night" before hanging up, hating that his family's words still simmered at the back of his already boiling headspace.

The morning drifted in light as a feather, and for the first time in his memory Will woke with a smile that reached a little too high on his cheekbones for comfort. Harley's wet nose tunneled under the blankets to sniff at his chin.

"Hey," he sighed into the sunlight, enjoying the warmth. "Daddy'll get you your breakfast soon, promise."

As if on cue, the doorbell rang. Will cursed inwardly, not wanting to leave the moment behind, yet needing to see whether the face on the other side would be Hannibal's. *Jeez. It's only a second date, Graham. Relax.*

When he poked his head tentatively out into the heat, however, no one was on his porch. Instead, an oblong canvas pouch tied with a bright blue ribbon sat prettily in the middle of it. Before Will could inspect it, however, his entire pack raced out of the door, bumping into his legs along the way before tearing into the package -- and digging happily into the jerky inside.

I come in peace, said the note that fluttered towards Will from the haze of fur and paws.

[10:28] Hannibal Lecter: *Your eyes close ever so slightly when you smile. I look forward to seeing it more.*

[10:30] Will Graham: Disgustingly cheesy, doctor. Where are you, by the way?

[10:31] Hannibal Lecter: *Behind you.*

Before he could register the woodsy scent of a familiar cologne, strong arms wrapped around his waist, and a warm, firm chest met his back.

"Good morning," Hannibal breathed, a grin spreading against Will's neck, triggering an echoing response from the man in his arms.

"Jesus -- " Will began, only to be silenced by a tightening of Hannibal's embrace.

"I hardly intend to be your salvation."

At this, Will huffed, partly in wonder and partly in joking indignation. "Of course you want me to sin." Hannibal cocked his head.

"No... " Trailing a finger from Will's chin to his Adam's apple, Hannibal relished the quickening pulse and expanse of warm, stubbled skin. "I want *us* to sin." A slow, shuddering breath shook him off, so instead he cupped the side of Will's jaw, tilting it slowly towards him, until --

"I --" Will gasped, "I'm not... good at this, or used to this, or... I just... " He trained his gaze on the floorboards beneath them, pulling just far enough away from Hannibal that they maintained their contact, but were kept at a more professional distance.

"I apologize if I made you uncomfortable," Hannibal murmured, gazing intently at Will's still-downturned eyes.

"N-no, you didn't. I mean." Gingerly, Hannibal took his hands, squeezing gently. *I'm not leaving.*

Shaking his head, Will started again. "I'm surprised when people even want to hang out with me. I'm just not used to... people being nice to me, I guess."

At this, Hannibal's heart simultaneously broke and leapt with joy. It was a sacrilege that such a beautiful, brilliant creature had been so unloved, but a rare euphoria for Hannibal to be the one to unlock Will's relationship with tenderness.

Several moments passed as he beheld the recipient of his greatest gift, until Will finally looked up, tears brimming in his eyes.

"What are you thinking?" he asked in a near-whisper. Hannibal simply shook his head, and extricated one of his hands from Will's, bringing it to the back of his neck -- questioning.

"I'm thinking... " His thumb stroked at the soft hair at Will's nape. "That I'd like to kiss you."

Another shaking breath preceded Will's response. "Why?"

"Desires are never themselves desired, Will, only suppressed... " Slowly, as if approaching a spooked animal, Hannibal leaned forward, allowing the tip of his nose to bump against Will's.

"... or indulged." With a deep exhale, he brought their lips together as Will gasped into his mouth and his tears smeared between their cheeks. They pulled apart briefly, only for Will's tongue to pry at the seam of Hannibal's lips, seemingly beckoning him closer, until a muffled moan broke forth from Will's throat, bringing him back to himself.

Mortified, he burrowed his face into Hannibal's neck, letting himself be held.

"It's still inconceivable to me," he mumbled into warm skin.

Hannibal petted Will's hair, smoothing broad circles into his back. "What?"

"That you want to... to kiss me."

"I'd also quite like to have a picnic with you, you know," came the teasing reply. "And many, many other things."

Straightening a little at this, Will allowed a sheepish contentment to reclaim his face. "Are you asking me out?"

Hannibal took his hand in one of his own, and picked up a picnic hamper, as if out of nowhere, with the other. "Too late," he chuckled. "I already have."

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